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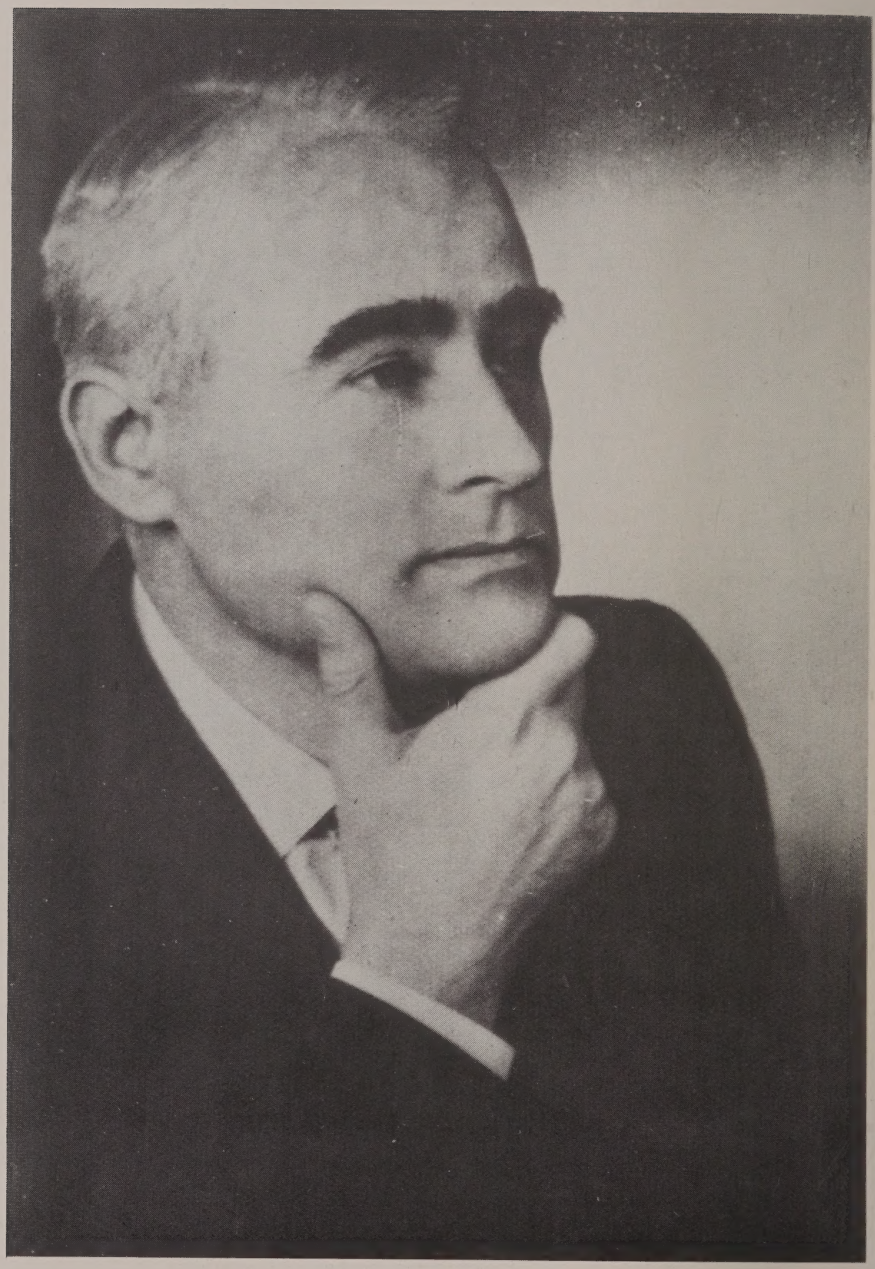
BY FRANCIS MERCHANT



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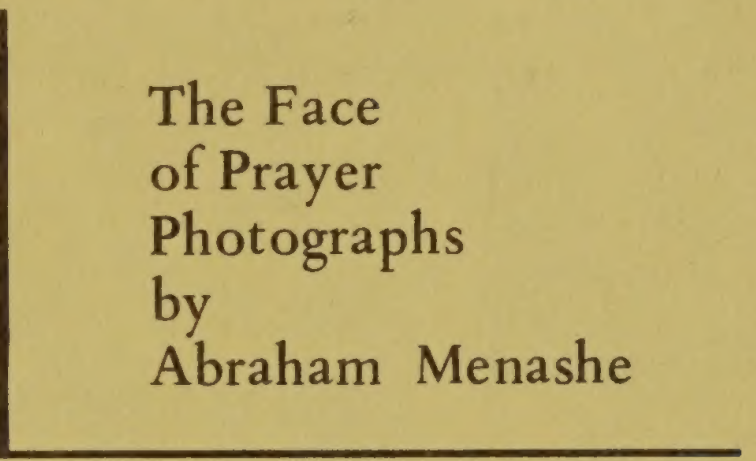

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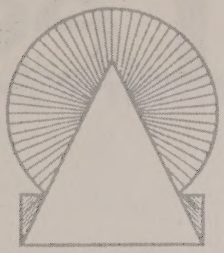

COURSE IN PRAYER
by Francis Merchant
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COURSE IN PRAYER

Lesson

"What a man imagines himself to be is of cardinal importance in his life experience."

"If a man can view the universe as a thought in the mind of a creator and earth as a testing place where he has the opportunity to develop the capacities of his soul, he may acquit himself bravely."

"The religions of the world are constantly calling upon us to exercise the creative imagination."

1

THE UPTURNED CUP

IN all ages, man, the great enigma, has sought to define his meaning in a time-bound world of endless change and certain death. Like a clock that has been wound, his life unfolds stage by stage, from childhood to maturity, and from maturity to old age — and in the midst of the process he pauses to discover the meaning of his appearance in this dimension of consciousness. That pause is charged with significance. It is a moment in which he puts aside all material concerns and addresses himself to primary questions relating to the purpose of his sojourn in time present, set between the partitions of the unknown past and the infinite future.

Out of this endeavor to explain his journey from birth to death the religions of the world have arisen. They all seek to lend meaning to his pilgrimage in time and space, and to indicate how he may most fittingly spend his energies during the transient period of his earthly existence. All of them seek to illuminate the heights and depths of human nature and to point him in the direction of his greater potentialities. In all cases he is admonished to turn his attention to the inner life, to the world of essences, and away from the domain of purely objective appearances. When this has been done, man himself becomes a problem in search of a solution, an effect in search of its cause.

LESSON 1

Those who move in this direction tend to cultivate dimensions in their natures and to listen more carefully to what has been called the voice of the silence. They accept the task of transforming themselves, just as the sculptor accepts the task of shaping rough-hewn stone into a desired image.

Nature affords a fascinating illustration of transformation in the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. The laboriously crawling creature enters a cocoon and emerges as a flying insect, beautifully attired. The change that takes place, it is interesting to note, occurs in a subjective state of withdrawal. The cocoon is the necessary link between caterpillar and butterfly. If we ponder on this transformation, viewing the entire process symbolically as it might apply to human beings, we perceive the necessity of intense subjective activity in the transformation of consciousness. In many religions this state of indrawing and reshaping of the self in a new image is associated with meditation and prayer.

The first point to establish is the possibility of a comparable metamorphosis in the human being; and the second, the means whereby such a change can be brought about.

All religions provide us with examples of the transformation of consciousness. Saint Francis was a pleasure-loving young man, but he suddenly renounced the world and extolled the virtues of poverty. A Sufi mystic was at one time the head of a band of thieves. Mary Magdalen's story is well known. The Buddha, on occasion, made converts among hardened brigands.

While man cannot retire into a cocoon like a caterpillar, other means are available to him. It is given to him to change his polarization or focus of awareness. The individual reaches inward, seeking to find a deeper center of gravity within himself, that creative essence of which the outer persona or image is but an externalization. The nature of that inner self has been variously designated in world religions. To the Hebrews, it is the *shekinah*; to Christians, "the Christ in you"; to Sufis, the divine friend; to Buddhists, the all-compassionate Buddha-essence; to Taoists, it is Tao; to the Hindus, Krishna. In all cases we observe a restructuring of life resulting from the integration of consciousness about a new center of gravity.

Meditation involves increased sensitivity to the delicate and imponderable thoughts that fall noiselessly upon the screen of consciousness. The cup of awareness is turned upward, ready to be filled. Prayer is innovative and creative. It requires the formulation of that which is desired and an attempt to precipitate outwardly that which has been interiorly approved. Implied in meditation and prayer, then, is the concept of man as the receiver and transmitter of energies.

A man's life may be described in terms of what he has received from life and what he in turn gives. There is reason to believe that only too many men are unaware of all that has been granted to them, and an equal number do not appear to have an adequate conception of the innumerable gifts that it lies in

their power to confer. Indeed, there is much in our civilization that tends to obscure these issues. Rebellious voices proclaim that little or nothing has been received, and in literature one reads again and again the belief that man is a creature of dust, doomed to eke out his days in misery and frustration while death hides ominously and sullenly at some unexpected turn of the road. Such a view helps to create a climate of thought that is antithetical to the development of man's subtler spiritual resources.

It should be understood that meditation and prayer derive their significance in large measure from a broad appreciation of man's potentialities. If we think meanly of the human estate, if we have a limited conception of what it means to be a human being, we may get little benefit from practices that concern the inner life. The assumption of behaviorists, for example, that man is nothing but a superior animal, or of the naturalists, who assert that he is the plaything of a capricious and purposeless universe, describes a limiting circle around their possible conclusions. The pre-Columbus authorities who fixedly believed that the earth was flat could never approve even the attempt to circumnavigate the globe.

The testimony of all religions exalts the human estate. The Buddhists speak of the possibility of achieving the expansion of consciousness known as nirvana; the Christians declare that the Kingdom of God, covered by many veils, to be sure, is within each person; the Hindu tells us of a higher self and the possibility of attunement with it upon achieving the state of *samadhi*; the Hebrews indicate that God's breath is man's life; the Sufis say much about mystic union with God. In all cases the possibilities inherent in the human experience are enlarged. Each faith lights fires that reveal new paths to a greater destiny. Horizons expand, and the spiritual striver catches sight of new mountains to climb. Thus the human estate is enriched and the nobler possibilities of creative living are increased. Men learn that they are actors in a greater drama, and theirs is the privilege of writing their own parts in the script.

Expansive assumptions regarding man's role in the cosmos point to the need for the exploration of inner space. The Old Testament makes the arresting assertion that man is made in the image of God. In the Middle Ages it was believed by some that each human being is a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm. In kabalistic literature the divine essence of light called Neshamah, present in every son of man, is inalienably allied with God. In Mahayana Buddhism, the striving soul that achieves self-mastery transcends the human state and may then embark upon nobler adventures in other realms of being. In these instances the assumption should be followed by demonstration or exploration. The means to such great ends involve meditation and prayer.

These considerations underlie the projected quest. The search in question should yield the enrichment of life, the enlargement of perspectives, and the unveiling of a nobler vision of destiny. These are the objectives that we set

ourselves as we experiment with techniques of the inner life.

Walking on a Rainbow

Our schools emphasize the importance of reason, but much less is said about a need to stretch the imagination. The ability to reason, a remarkable faculty which has helped man transform the world, is yet but one aspect of his many endowments. It should be complemented by the cultivation of the imagination. It is an instrument of self-transformation. The poet and the artist have consistently stressed the larger dimension opened up by the imaginative faculty. "Out of three notes," Browning wrote about a composer, "he created, not a fourth, but a world." Beethoven and Wagner transport the listener into a realm of enchantment that belies the humdrum domain of the commonplace. Poets like Whitman and Shelley lift us out of the daily round into a more rarefied dimension of experience. Fairy tales, honored in all countries, project us into a world of fantasy. Mythology changes the shape of the universe for us and alters the very atmosphere in which we live. It is the creative imagination in all these cases that is the agent whereby all things are made new. This is a theme that will be emphasized again and again.

What a man imagines himself to be is of cardinal importance in his life experience. If he conceives himself to be a small and insignificant bit of driftwood in a vast and alien universe, he will rather easily fall into despair. If he regards himself as nothing but a walking stick of protoplasm supported by a framework of bone, remaining on earth for a brief moment before being swept into oblivion, he may readily lose heart. If he imagines that the universe was created by change and that he is nothing but an adventitious accident, he may find the taxing experiences of life unbearable. On the other hand, if he can view the universe as a thought in the mind of a creator and earth as a testing place where he has the opportunity to develop the capacities of his soul, he may acquit himself bravely. Keats took new heart when he viewed the human experience as a process for the fashioning and developing of the soul. Greek mythology tells us that the labors of Hercules prepared him for his postmortem translation to the starry heavens as a constellation. Such a view of life is invigorating, opening new vistas of possibilities and lending meaning to our struggles and sufferings. To conceive of the larger framework that adds another dimension to man's striving is an act of the spiritual imagination. Thought must soar to achieve this perspective.

The religions of the world are constantly calling upon us to exercise the creative imagination. The Hindus tell us that each man's higher self is a being of grandeur and that *atma*, or divine spirit, resides in his heart. A Sufi mystic referred to himself as "a pen in the controlling hand of the Lord." The Buddha asked his disciples to imagine their thoughts encompassing the world with peace and joy. The Hebrews referred to God as a mighty fortress. Christians believe in ministering angels and guiding stars.

Meditation and prayer require this kind of outreaching. The meditator remembers he is living in a universe of mysteries and marvels. He knows that we are surrounded by unknown powers and is pleased that the explainable is but a minute fraction of the unexplainable. No one knows the original cause of the cosmos or the significance of the drama of the heavens. No one can explain how it is that life is self-perpetuating over eons of time. Even the nature of thought is not understood. In a universe where the vastness of human ignorance far outweighs the tiny accumulation of knowledge, the meditator is disinclined to shut off the valves of the imagination and to set limits to man's aspirations and achievements. He is well aware that the purpose of man's long journey in time and space is attended by more questions than answers, that soul and spirit are variously defined, that death and the possibility of life without form are still engirded in mystery. In such a world the meditator refuses to take refuge in rigid and unthinking negation. Instead, he prefers to walk on a rainbow and to light his candle at the stars.

Turning the Prayer Wheel

The tradition of prayer is universal. In all ages men have appealed to higher powers, sensing the involvement of the creator in his creation. Of course, the nature of the prayers was diverse; some concerned personal requests; others voiced a desire to achieve unity with the originating source. A Muslim mystic expressed the value of impersonal prayer when he wrote: "O God, Thou Knowest that Paradise weighs not with me so much as the wing of a gnat. If Thou befriendest me by Thy recollection, and sustainest me by Thy love, and makest it easy for me to obey Thee, then give Thou Paradise to whomever Thou wilt."

The manner in which other generations have prayed deserves careful study, for the aspirations of human beings down the ages have created a climate of thought which might be regarded as a kind of psychic environment. A Greek, knowing the psychological tendency of human beings to request that which is harmful, formulated the following prayer: "Do not grant me what I request, even though I pray for it, if it be not good for me." It requires a good measure of maturity to understand that our own prescriptions may yield questionable results. For this reason, perhaps, the one who prays often uses the self-effacing statement, "Thy will be done, not mine." To know what is best for a person in any given situation requires the highest order of insight and wisdom.

The Hindus set forth creative life objectives in the exhortation: "Lead us from darkness to light, from error to truth, from the unreal to the real, from death to immortality"; and to this has been added, "Lead us from chaos to beauty, from the individual to the universal." How these results may be achieved is not spelled out, for the methods vary widely in accordance with the differing needs of human beings. The universal desirability of moving in the

direction of such goals, however, is generally acknowledged.

The mood and disposition of the one who prays should also be considered. Reflective, calm, and composed, he eschews disturbing agitation and distracting excitement. "Be still and know that I am God," enjoins one of the Psalms. Again, we read, "In quietness and confidence shall be thy strength." From the Talmud we gather that the attitude itself has a significant value. "Silence," it is said, "is a healing for all ailments."

The Lord's Prayer has been spoken for many centuries, and its repetition has made it a familiar exhortation. It asks that the Kingdom of God be established on earth, that a higher power guide and direct the human race in accordance with its superior wisdom. The Ave Maria is associated with the rosary that, as legend recounts, was said to have been given to Saint Dominic.

Each person understands that he is, in the very nature of things, a small unit in a universe of inconceivable vastness and overwhelming energy. When he contrasts his smallness with the incommensurate greatness of the cosmos, he seeks to identify himself with the spiritual purpose that governs creation. In this spirit the Psalmist wrote: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

A modern exhortation invokes transforming light, and love, and power to the end that the human race might fulfill the purpose for which it was intended:

From the point of light within the mind of God,
Let light stream forth into the minds of men.
Let light descend on earth.

From the point of love within the heart of God,
Let love stream forth into the hearts of men.
May Christ return to earth.

From the center where the will of God is known,
Let purpose guide the little wills of men,
The purpose which the Master knows and serves.

From the center which we call the race of men,
Let the plan of love and light work out,
And may it seal the door where evil dwells.

Let light and love and power restore the plan on earth.

Enlargement of Scope

Prayer is often associated with orthodoxy and with the repetition of

stereotyped requests. Such a view is partial and limiting. Everyone, both orthodox and unorthodox, may find the practice of prayer meaningful. Of course, much depends on our definition of this spiritual exercise.

The focusing of thought for constructive ends is prayer, and the sensitizing of our response mechanism so that it might register the subtleties of the inner life is meditation. Every person who addresses himself to solving a problem is really asking for the light that will produce a solution. When the problem involved touches the larger concerns of human existence, the relationship of man to his source or to his fellows, we enter a subtler dimension of awareness. In so doing, we approach one of the sacred tasks given to every son of man — the task of discovering who he is and into what he is capable of unfolding. The search for meaning, the effort to untie the knot in which all are bound, should lead to an enrichment of life and a broadening of consciousness.

In connection with our central theme, several questions immediately arise. For what do we pray, and to whom? These questions will no doubt be answered in varied ways by different people. Let us merely list a number of creative possibilities, knowing in advance that we can provide only tentative answers to a multi-dimensioned problem. We pray for enlightenment, for the understanding that will enable us to live wisely and not to waste our days in a vain search for baubles, for the strength to endure adversity, for the grace to be worthy of our sufferings, for light to define the path to the Highest, for the alleviation of human tribulation, for the vision that will guide the feet of struggling humanity.

We pray because we have faith that the powers responsible for our presence in this space-time continuum have set us here for a purpose that we are called upon to discover. Some persons may pray to that part within themselves that links them with the infinite and the eternal — that which the Hebrews call Neshamah, and the Hindus, the Krishna essence. Others may pray to the subjective source from which all objective existence flows — to the Father in heaven, as the Christian phrases it, or to the Beloved of the Sufi mystic.

ASSIGNMENT

1. *Optional.* Would you care to comment on the pages you have just read? Perhaps you might wish to share your views in connection with the various subjects discussed.
2. *Experiment.* If you are so minded, would you experiment with yourself and record the results? Formulate one or more prayers in regard to a problem that concerns you, saying them daily in an atmosphere of quiet. Indicate the results, if any, that you observe.
3. As an exercise in the stretching of the imagination, consider your mind as a radiating point of light. Send forth that light to others; in addition, suffuse yourself with this invisible radiance as though you were giving yourself a light-bath. Note the results.

COURSE IN PRAYER

Lesson 2

THE SUBJECTIVE EMPHASIS: THE VERTICAL APPROACH

"Many specific examples could be adduced to prove that sinners have become saints, and thieves, honest citizens. En masse, however, the improvement of human beings has been distressingly slow."

"The success of any civilization, we contend, may be measured by the kind of human being it produces."

"There is a hidden greatness and splendor in man which, in ordinary circumstances, may never become manifest."

"The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

MAN is a symbol in search of its meaning. This is part of his dilemma. Surrounded by mysteries, he has comparatively little certain knowledge; in large part he must grope his way by insight and faith. Many voices appeal to him, each pulling him in a different direction. The religionist is inclined to prescribe unshakable faith, whereas the scientist counsels caution until all the facts are known. Faith, however, is a garment of many hues, and a man may die long before a thimbleful of directional facts has been gathered. Votaries of pleasure are not wanting who hold that all speculation concerning man and his place in the universe is useless — and that it is best to spend the fleeting hours in pursuit of tangible satisfactions and pleasures. In only too many cases people are content to live from day to day, content to follow the daily routine and to act within the narrow circle of their limitations. They seem satisfied to imitate others, conforming readily to mass trends. The changing fashions of the day serve as their guide. Then, too, men and women of competence and capacity devote themselves to the accumulation of wealth or to the pursuit of power — and only a crisis will make them ponder the ultimate purpose for which they engage in these activities. For those who are content to rest in scepticism, the comment of Hafiz might be appropriate: "Any object of adoration is better than self-worship."

Each individual is called upon to decide which way he will go, but no one is equipped with full knowledge in making choices. The accumulated knowledge of science is fractional. One third of each day man spends in sleep, so that he is unconscious for a large part of his stay on earth. Again, he is unaware of what others are thinking, and therefore finds it difficult to form judgments about them. As to the nature of the universe in which the earth is but a very small part, our knowledge is exceedingly fragmentary. And yet, in spite of these drawbacks, we must make decisions; we must arrive at conclusions; we must find our direction. It should be remembered that no conclusion is also a conclusion, albeit a negative one.

In these circumstances it is by no means easy to find one's way, and we can deeply sympathize with those who move frustratedly in blind alleys. Fortunately, man is not left without resources. He is gifted with the power of thought, the pondering mind, and the discriminating heart.

What has man done with his mind? Scientists have reshaped the world; inventors have produced innumerable machines that replace manual labor; businessmen have created a network of trade that stretches around the earth. These achievements in large measure concern outer progress. They are, to be sure, very encouraging, but they represent but a partial accomplishment. Inner

progress is a somewhat different matter. The quality of human beings has not changed as significantly as the outside world. This realization is often expressed in the thought that human nature, considered as a whole, does not change. Many specific examples could be adduced to prove that sinners have become saints, and thieves, honest citizens. En masse, however, the improvement of human beings has been distressingly slow, and yet, is it not more important that they become wiser than that the world about us be altered for the better by discoveries and inventions? This problem overshadows all others. The destiny of the human race depends upon the improvement of the quality of man's consciousness. There is a direct correlation between our failure to give priority to this problem and the high incidence of mental illness in our society.

Our chief concern, then, is inner progress. The success of any civilization, we contend, may be measured by the kind of human being it produces. Material prosperity, however desirable, is a secondary matter. Improving the conditions of life is indeed commendable, but improving human beings is even more important. The best civilization cannot survive if mean-spirited and morally bankrupt citizens arrogate power to themselves.

How, then shall we undertake the great task of improving human beings? The first step involves a change of focus from the outer to the inner, from the objective to the subjective, from the domain of things to that of ideas. The Greek injunction "Know thyself" is an invitation to look within. As we turn our gaze inward, however, certain dangers confront us. Lurking in the subconscious are many tendencies that are repugnant to the discriminating mind. The psychoanalysts have wallowed in this twilight realm, in many cases never moving beyond it. A look into this disagreeable area should serve the useful purpose of sensitizing conscience, of making the individual more keenly aware of the opposing forces in his nature. If a man is displeased by what he observes in himself, he should try to reshape himself in a nobler image. In a sense, this is the meaning of repentance.

Beyond the negative elements lies the greatness that slumbers in every man. The potentiality is there, but it must be awakened. Sometimes a crisis has this effect. The concentration camp experiences of World War II produced evidence that should have altered our psychology textbooks. Human beings who were subjected to the utmost degree of brutality did not necessarily revert to animal behavior. In fact, many instances of great heroism are reported. Some prisoners, despite the dire conditions of life, performed acts of exemplary self-sacrifice. In studying the records, one cannot help feeling that there is a hidden greatness and splendor in man which, in ordinary circumstances, may never become manifest.

The calling forth of that hidden greatness is the central purpose of this course. As we turn our gaze inward, however, we must be prepared to perceive negative elements and to engage in the struggle to eliminate them. Saint Paul may have had this inner battle in mind when he counseled his readers to "fight

the good fight." Out of such struggle the greatest good emerges. In this internal war, prayer is a weapon that is available to everyone who cares to use it.

The subjective orientation is recommended by world religions. "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you," we are told, an implication that the inner search is of transcendant importance. Within the heart, say the Hindu scriptures, is *atma*, the spirit of the universe.

A subjective emphasis is suggested by a common symbol, the cross. It consists of two components — a vertical and a horizontal element. The vertical piece stands on the earth and points upward to the heavens. It represents man's relationship to the Highest. The horizontal arm is parallel to the earth and signifies man's relation to his fellow man. It is interesting to note that the horizontal component cannot stand by itself, but the vertical can. This upward-pointing component symbolizes the link between the personality and the soul, between man and God. It suggests an upward movement from effect to cause, from the emanated form to the emanating source. The objective manifestation is thus related to the subjective purpose from which it was generated.

When a man turns inward, he seeks the causative source of his life manifestation. This involves a relationship with the highest part of himself. The emanated substance seeks to discover the purpose of the emanating source and to make the objective form fulfill the subjective intention. The means to achieve this end concern aspiration, meditation, prayer, and invocation. Words frequently tend to becloud the central issue, and theologians have been hard put to define their terms. Instead of referring to the more conventional phrase of man's relation to God, we might just as well speak of his relation to the causative factor, the source, the evolutionary drive, the generating will, or the form-producing essence.

"Knowing thyself," then, should not only involve a knowledge of negative personality traits but also of the higher reaches of the purposive self. It is a creative relationship that is sought between the outward expression and the inner originating source. The self we know is but a partial manifestation of the self we do not know. Communication between the two attunes the instrument to its creator.

How can this desirable relationship be achieved? This is the problem that has exercised thoughtful men and women in all ages. It is the consensus that the quest is difficult but most rewarding. Of all the activities in which a man may engage during his lifetime, this is one of the most meaningful.

Techniques

The means whereby a man may become acquainted with his spiritual self are varied. World religions suggest a number of interesting techniques. The admonition of the Christian is to love God. The Hindu scriptures counsel the seeker to renounce the fruits of action, dedicating all he does to the Highest; or

again, to rise in consciousness by meditation. A mystic counsels us to beat upon "the cloud of unknowing" that separates us from God by ardent prayer. Brother Lawrence, performing humdrum duties in the kitchen, sought to practice the presence of God. Shankaracharya advised his followers to assert again and again their identity with the divine flame of which they are the sparks. The Sufi seeks by intense devotion to achieve union with the godhead within.

All these methods are helpful in climbing the mountain of perfection. They remind us that striving souls have for many centuries faced the same task which confronts us. As they found the way that leads from darkness to light, so may we.

For our purposes, let us consider the problem of our vertical relation to the Highest in terms of aspiration, meditation, imagery, and prayer.

We week to develop a practical program of meaningful exercises rather than excite elevated feeling that are undependable and often evanescent. Just as the mind is filled little by little with knowledge, so must we proceed methodically to refine our spiritual sensitivity. Our purpose is to establish a life rhythm — an achievement all by itself.

Aspiration

"An aspiration," wrote R.L. Stevenson, "is a joy forever." Just as education depends on a continuing desire for knowledge, so the development of the inner life depends on persistent aspiration. Fire is a symbol of this upward-tending impulsion. Each day a person should symbolically light a candle within his heart as a token of his directional striving. Schools encourage the will to know, and well they should, but far less is done to nourish the will to aspire.

Accumulation is quite different from aspiration. The businessman accumulates money; the academician, facts; the scientist, knowledge of nature. Aspiration is a flaming process that burns away the walls that separate a man from the ideal toward which he strives. It is the process that brings together seeker and sought, actual and ideal. The many are thus resolved into one, and the outer is fused with the inner. For the mystic, aspiration is a means of approach to God.

Three elements are distinguishable: the person who aspires, the object of his aspiration, and the process he employs. In terms of our discussion, the individual aspires toward his causative source and uses prayer as the process. Standing at the foot of the cross, he looks upward and seeks to be at one with the highest point; and the leap forward from lowest to highest is accomplished by prayer.

An Eastern sage urged his disciples to repeat again and again, "I am the Eternal." At first glance, this seems to be a contradiction, for it is a well-known fact that men are mortal and that the body perishes. Here today and gone tomorrow is the plight of man through the ages. However, the Eastern

sage believed that the essence of man is eternal and sought to identify himself with this portion of the self. The body, we may speculate, is the lowest part of the vertical component of the cross, subject to time, change, and death. The causative factor may be regarded as the topmost point of the vertical element, untouched by temporal concerns, separate from the physical tenement it briefly informs. In theological terms, this is the "father in heaven" who manifests on earth through the son.

The purpose of prayer is here indicated. That which is transient and temporal seeks to be united with that essence which is eternal. This involves a new sense of identity, a shift of focus from the unreal to the real, from the changeable to the undying, from the smallness of the personality to the largeness of the soul.

Aspiration, then, is a generator of the light that defines the path and the fire that burns all to unity.

Meditation

Rest and quiet are often prescribed by doctors for persons whose nerves are jangled by the hurly-burly of everyday living. The nourishing properties of silence have thus been clearly acknowledged. However, there is no need to wait for a jarring crisis before we week silence. Each day we may set aside a brief period during which we can enjoy the benefits that healing quiet confers. Such an atmosphere of silence promotes meditation. It is directly related to reflection and communion.

As it is difficult to hear a whisper amid noise, so it is difficult to make out what the voice of reason has to say to us during moments of emotional disturbance and clamorous self-assertion.

All discussion involves alternate articulation and listening, that is, speaking and quietly attending to what is said to us. Such listening is akin to meditation, for it requires receptivity to impinging stimuli.

The world addresses us in non-verbal language. The flowers speak to us in spring, and the stars converse at night, but they use an alphabet quite different from the one to which we are accustomed. We should try to become responsive to these languages, and above all, to the delicate speech of the soul. It is unfortunately true that many people respond more readily to the insistent voice of pain, paying a little more attention to a toothache than to the whispers of the inner self.

If prayer may be likened to elevated speech, meditation may be compared to earnest listening. The meditator seeks a place of quiet and then tries to match the outer silence with inner peace. He stills the emotions, for he does not wish to be influenced by moods, and he stills the calculating mind, for he seeks to communicate with the higher part of his consciousness. At this point there is danger of lapsing into a kind of quietism, but the use of the creative imagination can avert this condition. It should be remembered that the meditator seeks to be impressed by a subjective source, and that the registration of such an

impression is an exercise in subtle reception. Standing upon an imagined mountain peak, the meditator may visualize the sun emerging from clouds and shining upon him. Or again, he may hold up an empty silver vase and imagine the waters of life pouring into it. These acts of the creative imagination may serve to help the individual ascend beyond that which is the present reality to the domain of the envisioned ideal.

Imagery

Vivid images are to be found in world religions. The Holy Grail is a well-known symbol, and so is the Rock of Ages. "Be ye lamps unto yourselves," the Buddha admonished his disciples. The East has a saying that the shining dewdrop slips into the sea — meaning that the individual unit merges into the universal consciousness.

Such images can be enriching. They provide themes for extended meditations. The searching mind can find many additional examples. The river that ever flows toward the sea suggests a movement from the individual to the universal. The dawn is the revelation accorded when light shines into the precincts of darkness. The moon reflects the light of the sun as the personality should reflect the light of the soul. Within the pitchblende the scientist finds the precious radium, just as the seeker finds the spiritual essence within the prosaic personality life. The transformation of the crawling caterpillar into the flying butterfly points to the reshaping of man in his spiritual image.

The Psalmist writes, "Thou preparest a table before me," but leaves us the task of visualizing the symbolical food placed thereon. "Give us this day our daily bread" is not simply a prayer for sandwiches and muffins, but rather for that which nourishes the spirit. Each person would do well to hold out his empty cup daily, metaphorically speaking, so that it might be filled with the waters of life.

Images can thus be effectively used in meditation and prayer to link the intangible world with the tangible.

Prayer and the Vertical Relationship

A fountain sends forth a stream of glistening water into the air. A persistent upward pressure, generated by the fact that the source is located at a higher altitude than the point of emission, drives it skyward. There is symbolism concealed in this physical phenomenon. Prayer should rise like a fountain from man to the source of his being. A channel can thus be built between the outer person and the inner self.

An immediate good derivable from such prayer may be expressed as wholeness. The outer desire is harmonized with the inner intention. "Thy will be done" is an expression of a willingness to allow the prescriptions of the higher self to supersede the preferences of the personality. In a sense, it is the subordination of the self to the soul. The warring elements of the personality

are thus harmonized by making them responsive to a higher will.

Thus, a direct result of the vertical relationship established by prayer is wholeness of personality. This manifests as a greater sense of purpose and a subduing of the warring elements that pull in different directions. "Thy will be done" is a model prayer that produces this effect.

Another result of inward-directed prayer is guidance. Again and again we stand at the crossroads, and the problem is in which direction we should move. The East provides us with a prayer in this connection, namely, "Lead us from darkness to light." This is a generalized statement that has many applications. Our task is always to move toward the light — to go from ignorance to knowledge, from that which is to that which ought to be.

Wholeness and guidance, then, are two general results that arise from prayer that emphasizes the vertical relationship of man to God.

ASSIGNMENT

1. *Optional.* Any comment you may have concerning this lesson would be appreciated.

2. *Experiment.* Practice meditation and prayer for at least half an hour each day. Choose one of the following themes: a) Thy will be done, b) Lead us from darkness to light, c) I am the Eternal, d) I place an empty vase upon the altar that it might be filled with the waters of life.

3. *Stretching the Imagination.* Test the value of constant repetition so that the key thought becomes an integral part of you: I send a filament composed of lighted thought to the highest part of myself.

4. *Sharing.* (Encounter with Prayer). Please share realizations and results flowing from this work.

5. *A Suggested Form for Prayer and Meditation* (alter to suit your needs):

Stage 1: Affirmation: I am the Eternal.
Stage 2: Dedication: I seek to fulfill the cause for which I came into this world.
Stage 3: Reflection: Make me an instrument of light.
Stage 4: Prayer: (Repetition). Formulate a prayer that has special meaning for you — for example, "Make Thy face to shine upon me."

COURSE IN PRAYER

Lesson 3

BE A LAMP: THE HORIZONTAL APPROACH

"Meanness of soul is failure, not lack of worldly goods."

"Compassionate thought can be endlessly expressed with no sense of loss or any stringency of capital."

"The unpleasant feeling of being nothing but a cog in a machine or of being alien-ated from society may give place to a new sense of responsibility and increased understanding of human potentiality."

Relationship

MAN is not only related to his generating source, but to other units of consciousness as well. Born in a family, he is immediately linked to brothers, sisters, parents, relatives. In time he will develop a circle of friends. At school he is linked to teachers and fellow students. Marriage establishes a lifelong bond with a member of the opposite sex. In business he will find himself related to his employers, the customers he serves, and his associates. Then, too, he is linked to his country and to the inhabitants of other countries. Inasmuch as the earth is part of the universe, about which he knows very little, he is necessarily unaware of his relation to civilizations in other parts of the cosmos.

It would seem, then, that life prescribes relationships. No man can escape them. They are an inalienable part of life. The quality of relationship, however, man can determine. While he cannot escape being bound to others, he can affect the nature of the binding essence.

Each man, then, must decide how he wishes to relate himself to the rest of the human race. For example, does he wish to have them serve him, or is he willing to serve them? At the end of his life, will his obligations to them exceed their obligations to him, or vice versa?

The choices are varied. Thieves, criminals, forgers, and brigands seek to derive selfish profit out of their relationships. Exalting themselves, they fail to recognize their obligations to other units of consciousness. The perspective of the saint, the philanthropist, and the server of his fellows is quite different. They wish to confer more than they receive. They serve rather than demand to be served. On a completely different level, economists speak of a favorable balance of trade when exports exceed imports. Spiritually, we may perhaps speak of a favorable balance of usefulness when a great soul contributes more than he receives.

Relationship involves reciprocal action. Each one influences all the others in some measure. No one stands isolated and alone. This means that no one achieves only for himself; his accomplishment is a contribution to the general good.

The question then arises, how can the average citizen, weighed down by care and exerting no great influence in the bustling world, make an outstanding contribution? The answer lies in the power of thought with which men have been dowered. Greatness lies within a human being, not outside him. It is

not dependent on material prosperity or on making a great noise in the world. Rather it is to be found in the generosity, the compassion, the riches of the heart. Such greatness depends on the subtle quality of a man's thought.

Greatness of soul is denied to no one. It is dependent on the manner in which the individual chooses to use the gift of thought. Meanness of soul is failure, not lack of worldly goods. Elevated thought — and here we touch on prayer — is a spiritual contribution all by itself.

While men may say much about lack of money, no one seems to complain about a short supply of thought energy. It is always there, waiting to be used. It is available in poverty as well as in prosperity. As a spider creates a thread out of itself, so man shapes his destiny by thought. Out of this strange substance a man may build a hell in heaven and a heaven in hell. All books are but the precipitated thoughts of their authors, presented to readers in the form of words.

We are often asked to donate money to charitable enterprises, but we are less frequently requested to contribute our thoughts. However, prayer can be this immaterial kind of giving — and in such giving a man is increased, not diminished. Compassionate thought can be endlessly expressed with no sense of loss or any stringency of capital.

Herein lies a field of activity for every human being on the face of the globe and a means of becoming a benefactor to one's fellows as well as to future generations. If he dedicates his thoughts to the upliftment of the race, he can perform a noble service and exert a beneficial influence in the world. Those who are troubled by world events and distressed by the perverse trends of the times may find a source of strength within themselves that will be creative, strengthening, and soul-satisfying. The frustration he feels when he conceives himself to be helpless in the face of overwhelming forces can be overcome by using inner resources that are only too often neglected. Our thoughts can easily go places where our hands can never reach, just as the compositions of a composer may influence untold numbers of people whom he will never see. For the countless numbers who suffer because they feel they are swept on by the overwhelming tides of the times, the possibility of creative subjective work should be especially appealing.

Meaninglessness is an affliction that troubles many people, psychologists tell us. In many cases it results in suicide. When the importance of inner effort is acknowledged, a new dimension of meaning emerges that lends dignity to human endeavors. The unpleasant feeling of being nothing but a cog in a machine or of being alienated from society may give place to a new sense of responsibility and an increased understanding of human potentiality.

The general vision of helping the human race by weaving creative patterns of lighted thought may be stimulating, but we must now address ourselves to the more specific procedures whereby this possibility may be worked into the fabric of reality.

Problem-solving by Prayer

Our mathematical textbooks are filled with problems which students, by taking thought, may solve. The methods by which solutions may be reached are clearly indicated. In social and spiritual problems, the procedures are far more vague and tentative. Perhaps this is one reason why the world is more advanced scientifically than it is socially and spiritually. This state of affairs should be changed by encouraging new, and perhaps unorthodox, approaches to our social problems.

For a long time we have heard that all problems are rooted in economics. The privations occasioned by poverty, it seemed reasonable to assume, tended to make people avaricious, mean, and criminally-minded. However, studies began to reveal that the children of wealthy parents were increasingly found among the alienated, radical, and criminal groups. These persons had suffered no deprivations or educational disadvantages. They had good prospects and enjoyed all that money could buy — but they became thieves, bomb throwers, drug addicts, social misfits, and criminals. It became apparent that their problems were not economic.

Many examples could be adduced impugning the concept that the solution of men's problems depends solely on the betterment of material conditions. In various parts of the world one may observe that increasing affluence has not necessarily made human beings better. Alcoholism, for instance, is not confined to the poor and needy. Criminality is not altogether the product of desperate poverty. The richest country in the world is not by virtue of that fact morally better than the poorer countries. Such assumptions are wide of the mark; other factors, it seems, play a significant role.

It would be a more balanced judgment to say that men's problems flow from their spiritual philosophy rather than from their economic condition. In fact, many of the great souls who have appeared on earth were actually very poor men. Jesus was not rich, nor was the Buddha. Socrates lived in poverty, and William Blake, the poet, had very little of this world's goods. Yogis and priests have renounced all possessions, holding that they are impediments to the spiritual life. When we talk of Milarepa, the Tibetan sage, or Epictetus, the Greek philosopher, we are referring to people who owned next to nothing.

Let us give thought, then, to the possibility that our problems are largely a function of our spiritual values. It follows from this assumption that changes in spiritual conceptions give rise to changes in material conditions. Of course, this approach is somewhat indirect, and achieved results may not too easily be measured. However, other ways have been tried and proved less than satisfactory. For example, in the rehabilitation of prisoners both excessive punishment and excessive leniency have yielded about the same number of persons who have returned to criminal activities.

The assumption that spiritual values deserve priority has consequences. Instead of continuing the attempt to solve all problems economically, we begin

to consider other approaches. We pay more attention to the prevalent thought patterns and consider ways and means of changing them for the better. The quality of life is stressed rather than quantitative accumulation of things. We accept our responsibility to create a climate of ideas that will promote the expression of man's nobler aspirations. Moreover, we take part in the struggle to improve the human race by affirming the spiritual values that should undergird a better way of life.

"Can a man, by taking thought," the Bible asks, "add a cubit to his stature?" In physical terms, the answer may be no, but in spiritual terms, yes. Indeed, a man is as great as the dimensions of his thinking. The thief is rightly condemned for thinking only of his own gain, and the philanthropist deservedly praised for his compassionate concern for other human beings.

Adding a cubit to our spiritual stature is exactly what the practice of meditation and prayer should effect. Theoretical doubts concerning this possibility should be countered by demonstrated effort. It should also be understood that patience is a necessary ingredient in this kind of work, for stubborn problems that have resisted solution for many centuries must not be expected to disappear overnight.

Let us indicate some of the areas in which improvement is highly desirable. Very tentatively, we list the following problems: crime, war, morality, capital and labor, poverty, and injustice.

In considering these matters, it is exceedingly important that we view them, so to speak, in a mirror, for otherwise we may be overwhelmed by the contemplation of human shortcomings. More than one thoughtful person has found the history of man's inhumanity to man a heavy burden to bear. Anyone who would contemplate the sum of human folly, perversity, cruelty, and ignorance must be careful to fortify himself. Mark Twain, it should be noted, became a confirmed pessimist toward the end of his life.

In dealing with the issues that concern us, we must avoid all emotionalism. We must always stand apart from the problem, not become trapped within it. This requires dispassion and discrimination. In other words, we must constantly identify ourselves with the solution and not with the problem. We see the shadows, but we work in the light. It is essential that we always retain our emotional and spiritual equilibrium. To the extent we fail to do so, we become ineffective.

Identifying the problem, we direct an imaginative beam of light at it. As the sun disperses the shadows of night, so creative thought dispels darkness. In a sense, we seek thus to be lamps diffusing light into dark corners of the world. This is all metaphorical, to be sure, but we act on the principle that thought is eventually objectified, just as ideas find expression in action. If an evil thought objectifies as a crime, a constructive thought ought to manifest in a beneficient form.

We avoid formulating solutions. This is in accord with the statement in

the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done on earth." Our demand is simply that the problem be resolved constructively in a manner that will bring the greatest good to the greatest number. We do not prescribe the manner in which the resolution is to take place.

It is of importance to remember that we should always stand above the problem, refusing to become emotionally involved, and that we do not impose our own solutions.

The repetition of an invocative statement may accompany the visualization of a lamp shining in the dark. For example, "Let the light dispel the darkness"; or, "Let the light of justice prevail." Each individual may formulate a statement of his own. It is interesting to note in this connection that the Creator, according to the Bible, used the invocation "Let there be light." It is a potent invocation that we, creators on a smaller scale, might well emulate.

It may be of interest to note that the sun, the indispensable factor in all growth, acts by pouring forth its light. If this is true in nature, might we not reason analogously in regard to human beings? If we conceive of persons as miniature suns, might they not, by shedding abroad their light, produce significant effects in their environment? It might be interesting to experiment with this concept, acting as if it were true until conviction replaces uncertainty.

As a matter of fact, the *as if* technique can be most helpful in connection with many prayer experiments. If our efforts are undermined by doubts, the results will suffer. It is better in such cases to put aside scepticism for a time and to act as if the imagined theory were factually sound. It is best to avoid spasmodic wavering between faith and doubt. In one of his books, Dostoevsky writes about the learned knife — that is, the critical faculty of the mind — and says that it can ruthlessly cut away the finest elements in human striving. It might be of interest to note that in the declining days of ancient Greece, the Sophists came to the fore. These were people who offered to prove, for a price, that the better cause was the worse. The mind should not be regarded as the utimate source of authority, although as an instrument it is invaluable. The progress of the human race, were it dependent upon the incontestable proof of spiritual tenets, would be exceedingly slow. As someone observed, what has concluded that we may conclude in regard to it?

We assume, then, that thought is a treasure of which man is the custodian, and that it represents an energy that can bring about vast changes in the environment. Prayer, being focused and directed thought, can bring about desirable transformations in civilization. The suggested method is simple, but imaginative. After a social problem has been selected, the individual refrains from imposing his own solution and takes care not to be overwhelmed by the negative or shadowy aspect. Standing in the light, he endeavors to act as a miniature sun. Visualization may be helpful. He may imagine himself to be a radiating lamp sending its beams forth to encompass the area where the prob-

lem exists. Again, he may use the imagination to construct balls of light which he sends forth. Other visualizations may occur to him. Shelley imagined himself as a cloud bringing the nourishing rain to the parched earth; and again, as the wild west wind that purified and cleansed the atmosphere.

This is distinctly an exercise of the imagination. The suggested methods stimulate an aspect of man's nature that tends to fall into disuse with the years. The balancing of the rational and the imaginative faculties is a desirable goal for all human beings. When this equilibrium is achieved, the gap between faith and scepticism will be bridged.

Having considered man's vertical relation to his source, we have now dealt with his horizontal relation to his fellow men. These two aspects are symbolized by the cross. Our purpose has been to present a method of achieving a creative relationship on both planes. No hard and fast rules have been formulated. There is much room for experimentation and the modification of procedural techniques. However, everyone who works in this field has the right to regard himself as a pioneer in an area where there is much yet to be done.

ASSIGNMENT

1. *Optional.* Compare your reactions to this lesson at the first reading and again after you have put its suggestions into practice.

2. *Experiment.* Choose a social problem. Direct a stream of continuing light upon it, asking that desired solutions be found.

3. *Stretching the Imagination.* As the water supply depends upon a reservoir, so may the spiritual energy supply depend upon a similar storage facility. Imagine yourself building a reservoir of light out of aspirational thought.

4. *Sharing.* (Encounter with Prayer). Please share realizations and results flowing from this work.

5. *A Suggested Form for Prayer and Meditation.* (Alter to suit your needs).

Stage 1: Linking with the Soul. Identify yourself with the serene, equilibrized soul. (I am the thinker, not the instrument used.)

Stage 2: Choose a social problem as your theme.

Stage 3: Encompass it with light. You may light up the area with many lamps.

Stage 4: Add to the reservoir of light for potential use in solving the selected social problem.

Lesson 4

SOUL MENDING

"It should be understood that the soul, in its long journeying, has incurred debts that must be paid."

"Not much is said about the ministry of pain, and yet it is one of the powerful shaking forces in the evolution of the soul."

"Perhaps we may consider all suffering as a kind of prayer, for the cry of distress rises upward to the courts of heaven and mingles with the invocative aspiration of the devotee."

"If good created the world, how did evil find so strong a foothold?"

LESSON 4

IN every quarter of the globe one finds hospitals — testimony that man is acquainted with suffering. Medical books list a host of diseases to which he is subject and which can cause him varying degrees of pain. Drugstores are filled with remedies for these multiple afflictions. In every age the shadow of ill health is discernible, and the history of every human being involves an acquaintance with pain.

Even great souls have not been immune to suffering. The agony of the Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane and upon the cross have been themes for many paintings. The Buddha declared that life itself is a form of suffering, for birth, death, war, disillusionment, ignorance are all productive of pain. Thomas More died on the scaffold, and Socrates was condemned to drink the poisoned cup of hemlock. All faiths have had their martyrs, who were punished for their beliefs.

How, then, do we in this day and age confront the sufferings that fall to our lot? Psychologists tell us that some people make the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain a guiding principle of conduct — only to find that the two are interlinked and eventually flow into each other. Dostoevsky held that suffering is a path to God, a means of burning out the egotism that separates a man from the Highest. The important consideration is not that someone suffers, the novelist believed, but that he should prove worthy of his sufferings. If the agonies to which a person is subjected do not change him inwardly, he has endured them in vain. The transformation of pain into spiritual gold is an art that deserves the most careful study. Sorrows as well as joys are teachers to those who have the willingness to learn.

In many quarters it is automatically assumed that the elimination of all suffering should be a goal of human endeavor. It is easy to understand and accept this view, but let us for a moment subject it to a closer scrutiny. If all the suffering in the world could by some miraculous means be ended instantaneously, would the human race be better off? A look at history may provide some interesting evidence. In the Second World War thirty million disappeared from the face of the earth. Such a catastrophe is sobering to contemplate, but human beings do not seem to have learned from it the lessons of brotherhood as well as one might expect. If such a massive tragedy does not bring about significant changes in human consciousness, one wonders what will.

We may consider these questions as they apply to the individual. Were the life of a given person so agreeably arranged that the shadow of suffering would never fall on him, would he become a nobler specimen of humanity? No doubt we should like to think so, but there is much evidence against a positive conclusion. It is well known to psycholgists that mothers who overprotect their children, making life easy for them, often do more harm than good. In fact, it requires the greatest wisdom to know how to help human beings, and we may do them a disservice if we remove the obstacles that they need in order to become mature. Nature provides us with illustrations. It not only gives us the

sunshiny days of spring, but it also flails us with the biting winds of winter.

The Stoics held that duty takes precedence over pleasure or pain. If a man recognizes an obligation, he should fulfill it, whether the task or the results prove agreeable or disagreeable. In a sense, this is the attitude of the soldier, who is prepared to lay down his life for his country. The envisioned end is regarded as more important than the possibly unpleasant means.

Not much is said about the ministry of pain, and yet it is one of the powerful shaking forces in the evolution of the soul. It is the chisel that chips away the egotism of the self-centered. It is a common language understood by all people the world over. The sceptic may deny God, but not the existence of pain. It is one of the great teachers, and those who refuse to be guided by wisdom attend to its sterner admonitions. He who rejects reason invites pain. When the soft voice of persuasion remains unheeded, the harsh tones of pain make themselves heard. The corrective power of suffering is a restorer of balance. It is often the soul's means of disciplining its instrument, the personality.

Perhaps we may consider all suffering as a kind of prayer, for the cry of distress rises upward to the courts of heaven and mingles with the invocative aspiration of the devotee. Were the anguish of pain focused, it might produce incalculable effects. The prayer of the one who suffers often achieves an intensity far greater than that of the one who is under less tension. Just as the call for help stirs us more deeply than ordinary utterance, the directed invocation of the distressed soul may bring forth a stronger and more effective response.

Causes of Suffering

Those who suffer are understandably more interested in the cure of their affliction than in a careful diagnosis of its cause — and yet it would be wiser to try to prevent the recurrence of the ailment by understanding what produced it. The habit of taking pills to relieve pain emphasizes the removal of effects instead of the study of causes. An illustration may make this clearer. A person suffering from an ulcer was told that his nervous disposition was the cause of his sicknes. It was suggested that he alter his general attitude, but he preferred to undergo an operation that disconnected his vagus nerve. In this way he did not need to moderate his nervous irritability, but would still obtain relief.

The causes of sickness and suffering are varied. However, even in physical accidents there is often a psychic cause. For example, a large proportion of automobile accidents arises from drunken driving. Ulcers and heart disease are related to nervous tension. Melancholia is to quite an extent a state of mind, and so is paranoia. Mental illnesses flow from the character and disposition of the person involved. There are also, of course, many ailments incident to old age, when the soul is in the process of discarding the physical vesture. Psychological pain may affect great souls when they contemplate the state of humanity and realize to what extent human beings reject proffered

help. It should also be understood that the soul, in its long journeying, has incurred debts that must be paid.

In speculating on the causes of disease, we may generalize by saying that it arises from an unregulated flow of the circulatory energy to all parts of the system. Anger, passion, envy, and malice may have a generally obstructing effect. Mind and body are interrelated, and the quality of a man's thoughts finds objective expression in the personality. At this point medicine and religion meet, for the good life is directly related to good health. The seven cardinal sins are not simply moral vices; they manifest as physical afflictions. It is not helpful to regard health as wholly separate from the directional tendencies of man's thought. Explosive temper and violent anger are matters of temperament, but their effects on the body are detrimental. In only too many cases men could be healed if they were willing to alter a few aspects of what might be called their lifestyle. Eliminating unpleasant symptoms without carefully studying the causes that produced them may yield undesirable results. Persons who seek miraculous cures without a consideration of causes are unrealistic.

These preliminary considerations illustrate the complexity of the subject. In many cases suffering is connected with the purposes of the soul and acts as an educative corrective. What we should hope and pray for is that the intention of the soul be fulfilled, not that the pain mysteriously disappear. We do not automatically assume that the greatest good is the disappearance of suffering, but that the cause, of which the external condition manifests as an effect, should receive more attention.

Methods of Healing

Let us start by saying that wisdom diminishes pain. The Epicureans understood this principle and advocated a life of moderation and self-control. When intelligence and emotion are in conflict, each pulling in a different direction, discordant friction is the inevitable result. Perhaps this is why the Old Testament admonishes, "With all thy getting, get wisdom." It is good counsel and promotive of health.

In this sense a creative life view is one of the greatest aids for those who pass through grim periods of sickness. To suffer and to know not why is frustrating and annoying. A bitter experience that has meaning is far more readily endured than one that is totally meaningless. To have no idea what life is prepared to give one and, on the other hand, what one owes to life, is bewildering. Meaninglessness is a heavy burden for human shoulders to bear. The first prophylactic for the millions of hospital patients in the world is a view that relates them creatively and relevantly to the universe that produced them.

Wisdom is thus a healing influence. It is expressed by means of reasoned and intuitive thought. Because of this, perhaps, the reading of the scriptures and of poetry is a helpful experience.

Speech, too, can be a healing force. During a lifetime we utter innumerable

sounds, and it is not too much to say that our destiny is spelled out by our utterances. The words so readily poured forth affect other human beings for better or worse. The kind word soothes, and the obscene word repels. The foul epithet corrodes, and the courteous reply assuages. The thoughtful voice encourages a thoughtful response; in fact, the qualities a man has developed in his own nature call forth similar qualities in his auditors. For this reason, orators can sway crowds, sometimes leading them to violent, ill-advised action.

The deliberate use of thoughtful speech is therefore a method of healing. This involves the elimination of words and ideas derived from contempt, anger, malice, envy, or slander. The discipline of speech thus becomes a means of bringing healing energies to those who listen to our words.

A Key Approach

Let us consider the metaphysical statement that the universe is one — in other words, man lives in an ordered cosmos. Behind outer diversity lies inner unity. The many flows consequently from the One. The inevitable question that then arises is "If good created the world, how did evil find so strong a foothold?" The answer to this query is rather complex. As created, the world was good; that is, from the standpoint of God, evil was non-existent. Man, in his limited and separate state, beholds the outer world through the prism of his own imperfections. In a sense, he projects his own limitations upon his surroundings. Two aspects thus come into focus: God's world and man's world. The one concerns the vision of the whole; the other, the vision of a minute fraction.

What would happen if man, even for an instant, should gain the power to see all things as God sees them? Evil would vanish in the supernal light of the cosmic plan. Man would behold himself, not in isolation, but in all his unity; not in his separateness, but in his relationship to all that is.

Following this line of thought, we note that evil disappears as man seeks to conform his mind to that of God. Inasmuch as sickness is an evil, it would be screened out in such a process.

We have a clue here to a form of spiritual healing that depends upon a rejection of the illusion of man's separateness and an attempt to become at-one with the divine purpose that brought all things into being.

It follows from these considerations that an individual, by endeavoring to transform his mind, can bring healing to the body. Expressed in a different fashion, to the extent that a person could approximate the mind that was in Christ, to that extent he could free himself of his afflictions.

It has also been held that any person could exercise a healing influence if he were capable of beholding the afflicted sufferer from God's or the soul's point of view. Christian Scientists, for example, often move in this direction.

The method involved is not very complicated. The one who desires to heal

says, in effect, "I reject the limited testimony of the mortal mind and affirm that the one who suffers is perfect in the sight of God." This is actually an attempt to see the individual, as Spinoza put it, under the aspect of eternity. We are accustomed to say that each unit of humanity is immortal and eternal, but how many persons endeavor in practical terms to see their fellow mortals in this manner?

What happens when a person says, in effect, to another, "I behold in you the perfect idea God had in mind when he created you?" Much experimentation ought to be done with this concept. Both the healer and the healed could provide us with much valuable testimony. Enough evidence is already available to indicate the potency of this technique, but much remains to be done.

If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, healing may be in the vision of the illuminated human being. Perhaps these considerations help to explain the Biblical exhortation, "The Lord make His face to shine upon thee . . . The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace."

Area of Experiment

The assumptions made serve as a foundation for experimentation. Giving rein to the imagination, we try to go beyond the stereotypes that condition our thinking in this time-space continuum. For example, can we perceive flesh and blood in terms of energy? Even science admits this hypothesis. However, if man is an aggregation of energy units, and sickness is a hindering of the circulatory flow, then healing should come from a removal of the impediments that obstruct the free passage of the appropriate energies. If man is immortal and eternal, then the body is but the instrument utilized in time and space by the entity that transcends the objectified form. It is that part of the individual of which the body is a fractional expression — which ought to receive our regard.

How shall we visualize a person as an idea in the mind of God? Can we conceive that, underlying the objective circulation of the blood, there is a subjective circulation of light or electricity — and that healing may arise when subjective obstructions are removed? Is it possible that by holding a person in the light — an act of the spiritual imagination — significant results may objectively appear? Can we produce outer effects by inwardly sending forth the light of our blessing and our compassion?

Having done all that is possible for an afflicted person in physical terms, we may leave unexplored a much greater area that involves the use of the heart, mind, and imagination. Such a possibility is, to say the least, intriguing. It points the way to metaphysical remedies for the ills of mankind. Physical remedies and monetary expenditures become less important than a compassionate heart and benevolent thinking. Furthermore, cures so brought about would affect the soul, and not just the body. Then, too, mental and spiritual

help are within the capacity of everyone, being dependent for the most part on the will to help.

Many experiments along these lines are in order. For example, one person may paraphrase a Biblical statement by saying, "My light I share with you," imagining the benevolent energy of his thought streaming out to someone in need. Another person may imagine a line of light proceeding from soul to personality, eliminating obstructions. Still another may visualize the free circulatory flow of subjective light coursing through the constitution of the one who happens to be afflicted.

It should always be a primary concern to go beyond the stereotypes that have so generally characterized attitudes towards the sick and distressed. The feeling of helplessness must be replaced by a more confident reliance on new methods and techniques. The preoccupation with the objective will give way to an increased emphasis on the subjective. The person who seeks to heal will regard the outer manifestation as a kind of illusion in time and space. The Bhagavad Gita points to the higher self and lower self in man when it says, "Having pervaded the universe with a portion of myself, I remain." Thus there are indicated the self that moves in time and is mortal and the self that is outside of time and is immortal. It is with the latter and more subtle aspect that we seek to deal.

ASSIGNMENT

1. *Optional.* Keep a record of the inner experiences that arise from your prayer activities.

2. *Experiment.* Visit those who may be afflicted. Try to visualize them in terms of the concept, "I behold in you the perfect idea God had in mind when He created you."

3. *Stretching the Imagination.* Bathe someone who is afflicted with a continuing stream of light.

4. *Sharing.* (Encounter with Prayer). Please share realizations and results flowing from this work.

5. *A Suggested form for Prayer and Meditation* (alter to suit your needs):

Stage 1: Linking with the Soul. Identify yourself with the equilibrized soul. (I am the cause of which the body is the effect. A function of the inner self is to mend broken souls.)

Stage 2: Select the afflicted person you seek to help. Hold that person in the light, sending him or her your blessing and compassion. Imagine that person's soul energy freely circulating. Visualize this as conforming to a perfect pattern.

COURSE IN PRAYER

Lesson

"No choice is permitted except the manner in which we desire to face this experience."

"The prospect of living forever on this plane of illusion is distinctly unattractive and may arouse in us a sense of relief that such is not our destiny."

"We must decide whether we wish to be identified with what is fading, transient, mutable, and perishable, or, on the other hand, with what is immaterial, immortal, immutable, and eternal."

"The door of the cage opens, and the bird of the spirit flies upward and out of sight."

"Light I am, to light return."

5

THE WINNOWING SCYTHE

SOME men question the existence of God, but no one impugns the power of death. From the beginning of time, living things have been subject to a cosmic law that inexorably brings an end to the form through which a given life manifests. No man can escape this terminal point of departure. Neither the ingenuity of medical science nor the power of potentates can change the process. So it has been in the past, and so it is today. The terms of our existence on earth involve the prescribed cycle of birth, experience, and death. In regard to this process no man is free; everyone is compelled to accept the universal decree

LESSON 5

that the law of life includes the experience called death. No choice is permitted except the manner in which we desire to face this experience.

Despite the inevitability of death, the subject is avoided as a disagreeable eventuality. Many a person has come face to face with death before pondering the spiritual meaning of this universal experience. The hurrying years all too quickly bring a man to the point where he contemplates the end of his earthly endeavors.

Varied attitudes characterize the response of men to the approach of death. The most general one is foreboding, apprehension, and fear. Samuel Johnson, for instance, looked forward with dread to his final hours on earth; it may be parenthetically indicated that he very effectively used prayer to end his days in peaceful acquiescence. In other cases there may be anger at being ejected from a familiar habitation and at being projected into the unknown. Some persons have been known to cling defiantly to earthly existence, daring the powers-that-be to evict them. On the other hand, many cases of heroism are recorded. One priest who discovered that he suffered from cancer decided to refuse all medication to spend his remaining days preparing for the great terminal event. In concentration camps during the Second World War many brave souls met death calmly, courageously, and prayerfully. Socrates faced the terminal experience with philosophic detachment, and Jesus Christ haloed his final hours with sacrifice.

Our first task is to cut through the irrational emotionalism that surrounds the issue and to ponder on the spiritual meaning of this inevitable experience. The prospect of living forever on this plane of illusion is distinctly unattractive, and may arouse in us a sense of relief that such is not our destiny.

The condition of man is strange and troubled. Theologians tell him he is immortal, but he is overwhelmingly conscious of his mortality. They assure him that he emanates from a divine source, but the circumscribed world about him appears to be more sensational than metaphysical. Perhaps some part of this dilemma may be resolved if we reason by analogy that the instrument on which a musician plays is comparable to the body by means of which the soul remains in touch with the dense world we inhabit. Just as the musician needs his instrument in order to create music, so the soul requires the body in order to permit the metaphysical harmony of the spheres to be heard in the precincts of matter. Should the soul for any reason find its vehicle or instrument unsuitable or unresponsive, it will reject the means of contact and withdraw — and this is the process of abstraction that we call death.

If we consider the body as the vehicle of the soul, then death should be the equivalent of the indrawing of breath by the controlling agent.

From this angle of vision, human existence is the projection of a bodily form upon the plane of sensation, and death is the abstracting of essence from the precipitated form. Perhaps this is what the Eastern scriptures mean when they say that the universe exists for purposes of the soul.

To the extent that we identify ourselves with the body we may find death an event to be dreaded, but to the extent that we identify ourselves with the purposeful soul, we will find the termination of bodily existence but the end of an episode in the mighty drama of the immaterial self.

The question of identity is of major importance and involves a significant choice. We must decide whether we wish to be identified with what is fading, transient, mutable, and perishable, or, on the other hand, with what is immaterial, immortal, immutable, and eternal.

The simple preservation of the physical body in earthly manifestation is not the goal. The multiplication of years is not an end in itself. It is the intention of the soul that counts, the fulfillment of its purpose.

In all prayer with regard to death, then, we do not stubbornly insist on the prolongation of earthly existence as the highest good, but rather ask that the will of the soul be done. The well-known declaration in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy will be done," points to an identification with a higher purpose and a willingness to acquiesce in its decision.

To be human is to limit oneself, to accept a frail tenement of clay as a habitation, to encumber ourselves with the constrictive garments of form, to subject ourselves to the slow but relentless pulsations of time. In a curious sense, life in the body is a form of imprisonment. By the same token, death is release and liberation. The door of the cage opens, and the bird of the spirit flies upward and out of sight. On this plane only the empty cage remains.

The liberating aspect of death is seldom emphasized. In one of his poems Walt Whitman writes movingly about the process of abstraction, finding beauty and meaning in this phenomenon. The eternal pilgrim, after his sojourn on the dense material plane, returns home. The Irish poet, AE, seemed to have this in mind when he entitled one of his books *Homeward Songs by the Way* — home being the realm of essences where the soul dwells.

According to the view here expressed, many of the ceremonials that become customary when a person dies are out of place. The lamentations and wailings seem inappropriate on the solemn occasion when the pilgrim soul doffs its physical vesture. The deep depression of mourning suggests a belief that the shed garment is identified with the person who wore it. The selection of expensive caskets to house the cast-off body of corruption seems to exclude the incorruptible self that has escaped from the circumscriptions of time and space. It is high time that these old rituals were altered to reflect a new approach to the whole question of death. In fact, cremation has the value of implying that the physical remains of those who have passed on are far less significant than the essential life that once ensouled them. The process of death is divinely ordered, and it would be well to give mature thought to the wonder of the process and to the opportunities it may afford for creative cooperation with the inner self.

It is rather interesting to note that more attention has been given to the

crucified Christ than to the resurrected Christ. Here, too, emphasis is placed on the body rather than on the one who used it to achieve divine purposes.

The prayerful person should not allow himself to be weighed down by the gloom and pervasive apprehension so characteristic of the sickroom. Amid the evidence of man's mortality, the thoughtful individual should bring the assurance of a larger and more creative perspective. He well knows that if he is to be of any help, he must achieve equilibrium of soul and refuse to be drawn into the vortex of emotionalism and numbing grief.

What role can prayer play, then, during the final extremity when a person stands halfway in the familiar world and halfway in another dimension?

It has sometimes been said that the higher powers or gods must be addressed in their own language. Such speech is not common among sons of men, but prayer is closest to it. All that is trivial and irrelevant fades away, and only the larger issues remain. Prayer establishes a line of communication between a man and his innermost self. It enables the person undergoing the terminal experience to be a creative participant in a process in which many men find themselves helpless witnesses.

It is said in the East that a man's last moments before departure are of the greatest importance. They are directional. The archer's thought determines the flight of the arrow, to reason analogically.

In the process of dying, it is clear that the individual is in the grip of a mighty power that may not be withstood. In only too many cases he remains a passive observer while the inexorable force drives him out of the tenement he has so long inhabited. Several passages from the scriptures indicate how the individual undergoing this process can constructively respond. "Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace" is one prayerful utterance; and a second, "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." Still another is "God is all in all." These declarations involve a changed identification. He associates himself with the life of the spirit rather than with the perishing form.

In Walt Whitman's "Prayer of Columbus," the poet has the explorer say, "I yield my ships to Thee," that is, he turns over all he has to the greater power that he has long served. Thus he acquiesces in the larger intention that decrees an end to the form aspect of manifestation. Through the door of death a man may take only qualities and essences, but not one speck of anything material. As he moves toward the domain of essences, all attachment to the form side of existence will act as a hindrance. Relinquishment is the very nature of the process.

For the person undergoing this crucial process, prayer is a primary means of cooperation. However, it is often difficult for the departing person to cooperate unless he recognizes the possibilities and opportunities inherent in the situation. The scriptures do not usually deal at length with this subject, but they do point to profitable speculation with the statement that "God is light." In the Eastern scriptures we may find the imperative, "Lead us from darkness

to light." Pondering on these statements we may conclude that death involves a transferral from the world of form to the world of light. The polarization of consciousness shifts from the realm of things to that of essences. The person who seeks to promote this transfer may say, "I am the light, not the shadow; the eternal, not the transient; the flame, not the tallow. I move toward light supernal."

Visualizations may be of value. The golden winged bird flies toward the heights. The spark returns to the flame. The dewdrop slips into the shining sea. The ship of fire moves directly into the sun. "Light I am, to light return."

These concepts are suggestive. They may serve to indicate that much remains to be done to develop a thoughtful and meaningful approach to the great transition known as death. Experiments along these lines may help to dispel the shadow of gloom and bewilderment that hangs like an impenetrable pall over the entire experience.

Onlookers

Thus far we have been primarily concerned with the person who is undergoing the transition from the sense to the soul world. Onlookers and witnesses, however, could do much to be helpful and cooperative.

The observer should beware of converting the experience of death into an expression of unrestrained emotion. Such visceral reactions charge the atmosphere with obscuring passions. For thousands of years people have been weeping and wailing over the dying without producing any positive results. There is little gain in perpetuating outmoded and unprofitable customs.

Witnesses should seek to establish the outlines of a creative philosophy toward the entire experience. They should certainly not berate God for setting limits to the earthly sojourn, nor should they exalt wholly unthinking resignation as the full solution. The searching mind can rise to significant insights and comprehend some measure, however little, of the larger intention.

We are all familiar with the setting sun that fades into the western sky at the end of the day. Of course, the effect is illusory, for the sun doesn't set at all but continues to shine on some other part of the revolving earth. Night comes when the earth turns away from the source of light. Even then, however, as the sun fades, the stars come into view. The symbolism here is helpfully suggestive. To take a different example, the falling leaf in autumn becomes part of the earth that makes growth possible. Summer and winter suggest the intimate interrelationship between the outbreathing and inbreathing of nature. The foliage of spring vanishes in winter, but the seasons are interlinked — so much so that Shelley could ask, "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" We may also point to the analogy of the seed. The fruit may perish, but the seed remains as the promise of regeneration. Even a flower contains within itself the possibility of perpetuation; the form dies, but the essence lives on.

According to mythology, sleep is the brother of death — and there are, if

one ponders the matter, considerable resemblances. Both involve a shift in consciousness, a change of focus. Both require surcease from all activities in the physical plane. A sleeping person is dead to the sensory domain, but awake to the phantasmagoric world of dreams, that is, to a different order of reality. We regard sleeping and waking as two aspects of everyday living, inseparable from each other, as polarities that flow naturally into each other. Death, it would seem, is a prolongation of sleep. It might be of interest for persons who wish to stretch the imagination to enter sleep with the thought of preparing themselves for the ultimate state of separation from all sensory experiences. This would be in the nature of a rehearsal for the final departure. It is a venture in accustoming oneself to an inevitable and unavoidable eventuality — and on such occasions prayer is an indispensable aid.

Death is a shared experience, though it comes singly, for it applies very democratically to everything that lives. In a sense, it is a minor judgment day, when the quality of a man's life is assessed. It reminds us that there are universal laws which cannot, like their man-made equivalents, be evaded. It clearly indicates that we are pilgrims on this earth, set here for a limited period of time to work out our destiny. Our habitation, the body, is a temporary abode from which we shall one day surely be evicted. This consideration should cause us to approve Shakespeare's advice that we make the body subservient to the soul. Let the form nature be like the tallow that feeds the candle's flame. Thus shall we move from darkness to light and from death to immortality.

These considerations underline the constructive role that can be played by those who find themselves in the presence of death. Fortified by a contemplation of the larger perspectives, they will remain unshaken. Bringing the imagination to their aid, they will endeavor to see the ultimate experience in terms of the waning body. They will address themselves to that part of the dying person that is unaffected by the ebb and flow of the body nature. The unseen reality will engage their attention more than the pitiable spectacle of the ailing physical form. Their endeavor will be to help the sufferer find the spiritual resources to withstand the crucial ordeal.

Once again we may employ the creative imagination constructively by picturing lighted thought playing upon the person who is having the terminal experience. Each observer may formulate his own mental sending, but the following declarations may serve as illustrations: "Be stayed in sheltering flame." "Let light and love encompass you." "Let the light of the soul guide and direct you." "Let the eternal radiance of the soul enfold you . . . ."

Such inner activity will help the observer overcome the feeling of helplessness in the face of a shattering and overwhelming experience. The effect upon the one who is in the process of divesting himself of the body should be recorded, in as far as that is possible. Evidence should be carefully gathered in regard to the effectiveness of the indicated exercises.

There is a general belief that not much can be done for those who have

departed. The East holds a contrary view. Even in church services one notes the admonition to the dead to move forward into the everlasting light. Some schools of thought profess to believe that the person who has died retains his identity even though he has lost his means of manifesting on the physical plane. If the individual needed light and guidance in this life, he may need it to an even greater degree in the next. In the East those who have passed on are admonished to turn their eyes away from the past and direct them toward the center of radiance. As an experiment, those who remain here might say to the departed, "Seek the light supernal. Turn toward the source of limitless light. Follow the path of light to the circle of glory." The person who performs this kind of experiment may find it interesting to record his dreams, for the departed sometimes communicate in unexpected ways.

Out of such experimentation much valuable information may come in regard to one of the most mysterious processes to which every human being is exposed.

ASSIGNMENT

1. *Optional.* Keep a journal of your inner life.

2. *Experiment.* Establish your own philosophy of the meaning of death.

3. *Stretching the Imagination.* Visit those who may be ending their association with earthly life. Speak to them mentally and send them light. If someone has already passed on, admonish him daily for a period of time to move onward into limitless light.

4. *A Suggested Form for Prayer and Meditation* (Alter to suit your needs):
Stage 1: Linking with the Soul. (I am the self untouched by death.)
Stage 2: Hold the afflicted person in the light. Address that part of him that is unafflicted by the waning energies of the body. Ask that its pattern be made manifest. Enfold the afflicted one in sheltering flame. Visualize God as "all in all" and commend the person to that all-encompassing power.

Lesson

"Sceptics wondered if man was not supremely unimportant."

"What is man in comparison with this mighty spectacle of the heavens? What are his strivings and aspirations measured against the backdrop of such a majestic universe?"

"More than an earthling, a member of the cosmos, a citizen of the universe, man may have rights and responsibilities of which he knows little or nothing."

"It is high time we sought to discover our meaning in a planned universe serving unknown purposes."

6

THE SPOKE AND THE WHEEL

WHEN Copernicus discovered and proclaimed that the earth rotates about the sun, he started a revolution of great magnitude. It had been generally believed that the earth was the center of the universe about which all the heavenly bodies revolved, and this belief served to define man's relation to the cosmos. It was a rather egocentric view of the universe and served to enhance man's sense of importance. The entire Middle Ages unquestioningly accepted this conception. It established the position of man in the cosmos and lent dignity and meaning to his actions. The onlooking universe awaited his decisions and determinations.

The Copernican declaration that the earth revolves about the sun diminished the importance of the earth and, hence, of man. When modern science added further testimony to the effect that there are millions of solar systems in the incredible vastnesses of space, a reassessment of man's role in the cosmos became necessary. If the earth was but a pinpoint in a universe scaled to mind-bewildering immensities, what was man, a miniscule dot on the same globe? Sceptics wondered whether the earth was not supremely unimportant and whether man was but an odd piece of flotsam and jetsam spewed forth by chance. They thus diminished the stature of man, making him a tiny blob of insignificance in an immense and alien universe. Such a view detracted from the dignity of the human estate and impugned all human striving.

However, this view was also based on assumptions — even those who held it prided themselves on their scientific spirit. For example, it assumed that greatness and littleness are measurable in purely quantitative terms. Even in ordinary life we use this yardstick discriminately. A building may be larger than a man, but it is not therefore of greater spiritual value. Quantitative judgments can be very deceptive. The qualities of the spirit elude such measurements. A noble thought may be as big as the world, even though it be conceived in the tiny space of one man's mind. The physical dimensions of a person have nothing whatsoever to do with greatness of soul. Consequently a qualitative interpretation of the universe produces altogether different evaluations than does a quantitative one.

Another assumption is based on fear. Beholding a cosmos containing an

untold number of solar systems, of stars, galaxies, and constellations distant from us by astronomical light years, enclosed by space that has unimaginable limits, some persons shrink back not only in wonder but depression. What, they say, is man in comparison with this mighty spectacle of the heavens? What are his strivings and aspirations measured against the backdrop of such a magnitudinous and majestic universe?

A different interpretation results in different conclusions. Man is part of the mighty drama of the heavens, part of the grandeur of his surroundings, part of the greatness and wonder of space. He is a participant in a cosmic drama that has been unfolding since the creation. It is this very universe that has brought him forth. Standing on the earth, he surveys the stars — a symbolic statement indicating his relationship to other worlds. More than an earthling, he is a member of the cosmos, a citizen of the universe. As such, he may have rights and responsibilities of which he knows little or nothing.

Will man convince himself of his littleness or accept his greatness? Will he fall back in fear and depression when he beholds the infinite universe, or will he respond creatively and imaginatively by aspiring to become a cooperator with cosmos in the vast evolutionary drama that is ever unfolding?

A scrutinizing appraisal needs to be made of the littleness and greatness of man. Physically he is indeed small, a tiny drop in the vast ocean of limitless space. However, this minute stick of protoplasm bears within his mind the caged lightning of thought and the aspirations of a god. His greatness lies, then, in his moral and spiritual worth, in the quality of his inner life, in the creative power which associates him with the mightier Creator of the universe. Symbolically, man stops growing physically at a certain age, signifying that material growth is limited, but he need never stop growing spiritually. His greatness, then, lies more in the realm of spirit than of matter.

Man in his physical littleness confronts the immensity of the universe. Out of that encounter significant results may arise. If the outer greatness of the world can arouse in him the inner greatness of which he is custodian, he will find the experience rewarding. In a curious way the theme of man confronting the universe is an outer expression of what the theologian would say is typified by the soul of man in the presence of its Creator. A creative relationship between the two is a destiny-determining factor. Some day man may understand the paradox that his greatness lies hidden in his littleness and that limitations are a necessary condition of his larger prospects. Perhaps all greatness must first be defined in littleness. It may be that the incarnation of Jesus Christ points in this direction.

Out of these meditations a new conception of unity and universality emerges. The shaping powers that direct the affairs of cosmos are stupendous, and they create a pattern of order and beauty in the heavens. The same fire sends forth radiant light from all the suns and stars. The mighty energy that moves the planets in their courses around a central focus staggers the imagination. The time scale of the cosmos is based on millenia, and the plans projected

exceed human calculation. All of this suggests a mighty will that finds expression in the cosmos and urges all things onward to unknown destinations. If any man conceive of God as an abstraction of the metaphysicians, let him behold the vast and incomprehensible wonders of space nightly displayed before him and ponder the purpose of such a spectacle. If we interpret the statement in the Lord's Prayer — "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" — to signify that the hand that shapes the universe should actively mold our smaller lives, we may be touching on one meaning of this great invocation. That vast governing will organizes diversity into wholeness. Perhaps this is one aspect of the meaning involved in the statement, "The Lord thy God is one."

A consideration of the heavens should teach us to think in more universal terms. No doubt our preoccupations with earth life are understandable, but yet they are a bit provincial. We are part of a greater life, part of a larger drama. The entire earth is but one of many planets that circle unceasingly around the sun, whereas the solar system itself is one of many such configurations in the heavens. We are inescapably part of a planned universe serving unknown purposes. It is high time that we sought to discover our meaning in such a world order. Imaginatively, at least, we can turn our attention to the larger possibilities. If even a worm has great significance on earth, aerating the soil and aiding plant life, may we not assume that man stands for something in the grand design of the cosmos? Who knows what his relations are with other planets, constellations, and distant stars? Who knows whether there may not be life on other wandering globes and whether their evolutionary development may not in some mysterious manner be related to ours? Who knows whether our aspirations and overcomings may not have repercussions elsewhere in the limitless domains of the cosmos? As yet we cannot answer these questions definitively because science has not yet devised ways and means of exploring large areas of knowledge. However, we can begin to think, at least speculatively, of the wider possibilities that life may afford and of our potential relatedness to other worlds of being. At any rate, the very attempt to think in universal terms may bring with it an expansion of consciousness and a growth in understanding.

It is interesting that the word *universal* is derived from universe. The adjective suggests that we think in terms of the greater whole, of the larger plan of which we constitute an element. When we attempt to do so, we begin to see the affairs of earth in a different perspective. Many of the activities of men — the amassing of wealth or the hunger for power — may seem incidental or trivial. In the light of the larger perspective, the cherishing of resentments and the unsatiated search for pleasure seem wide of the mark. How much more meaningful it is to find one's place in an interrelated universe and to cooperate with the intended purpose of the governing will, at least to the extent that we are capable of grasping it.

The drama of the heavens is portrayed for us in more tangible form by

the annual circuit of the earth about the sun. In one sense it is the story of increasing and diminishing light. The summer and winter solstices mark the transitional points. From the latter part of June to the latter part of December, light diminishes; from the latter part of December to the latter part of June, it increases. The dimunition produces winter and the augmentation, summer. It is interesting to note in this connection that Christmas is celebrated toward the end of December. At this point, when we come to the shortest day of the year, the Savior, or Messiah, comes, bringing the light of the spirit. The sun sustains the life of the planet, but the contribution of humanity, we speculate, is the qualitative light of the inner self that contributes to the working out of divine purpose.

Easter, a movable feast, is celebrated on the Sunday that follows the full moon of springtime. The renewal of earth's fecundity is thus related to the resurrection of the spirit in man. The sun unfailingly provides the rebirth of nature, but humanity is not altogether equally prepared to fructify the life of the spirit. During this season, the individual may give thought to the theme, "As a higher power regenerates the earth and makes it bloom, so do I resurrect the image of God within the depths of consciousness."

In the annual ceremonial of the heavens, the waxing and waning of the moon has stirred the imagination of countless generations. Each month the light increases until it reaches a maximum point, and then it diminishes. It is to be noted that the moon when it is full most adequately reflects the light of the sun; at other times the reflection is varyingly partial. Twelve times a year this monthly drama is observable in the heavens.

Let us now indulge in some imaginative speculation. The scriptures say that man is made in the image of God, and this concept was interpreted in the Middle Ages to mean that man is a microcosm expressive in a small way of the macrocosm. This would mean that what is outside man is, in a minor way, reflected within him. The sun, for example, finds its human correspondence in the heart, and the moon in the mind. From another point of view, the sun represents that which is invariable, whereas the moon is variable, inconstant, changing. In man the spirit is the unchanging aspect, and the personality, altering with time and experience, the variable aspect. The full moon, therefore, symbolizes the moment when the changeable personality best reflects the source from which it receives its light. This is a time when a state of alignment exists between that which emanates and the instrument of transmission. In man symbolically this would represent the fullest expression by the personality of the larger purposes of spirit. For reasons of this kind, perhaps, much attention is paid to the full moon periods during the course of the year. For example, the yearly festival honoring the Buddha is celebrated at the time of the full moon of May. As already indicated, Easter is determined by the full moon, and so is Passover. Ramadan is a month of fasting and praying among Mohamedans. It is based on a lunar calendar; and a month is the interval from one new moon to another. Pentecost falls on the seventh Sunday after Easter

— and is consequently dependent on the full moon of spring.

The drama of the heavens is spelled out in terms of light — the unfailing light of the sun and the whirling planets that necessarily present but half their surfaces to the source as they turn. For the earth, there is the waxing and waning of the moon. Then there are the stars and other solar systems that illumine the universe. On a much smaller scale, the drama of light is enacted in man. The light of compassion, the light of intelligence, the light of striving, the light of dedication — all are blended in man. The scriptural admonition, "Let your light shine forth," may refer to the expression of these qualities of the inner life. At any rate, the suggestion that we should be like the sun and shed our light abroad is spiritually sound. As the sun accepts its responsibility to illumine the solar system, so ought we to acknowledge our smaller obligation of brightening the little world in which we live and move.

It would be interestingly imaginative to conceive oneself as standing in the center of the sun and acting as a distributor of the solar light.

According to one theory, the planets were originally part of the sun. After separation occurred, they moved in different orbits around the central focus. Might we speculate that at some time in the aeonic future they will return to the sun? It is an imagination-stretching theory. Are we, then, as children of light, as the scriptures phrase it, also children of the sun? The lighted way should eventually lead to the source of light.

A contemplation of the universe about us can yield significant insights and expanding perspectives. The world that appears to our sight is a perennial miracle. It is not only majestic and vast, but enigmatic and tantalizing, perpetually challenging us to fathom its meaning. Speculating on the visible universe, we may conceive it to be the expression of an inconceivably mighty will, operating through light and characterized by cyclic motion, manifested in time and space. More questions than answers arise as we meditate on its nature. In what direction is it moving? What destiny is it fulfilling? What purposes determine its action? What role does man play in the cosmic drama that is perpetually enacted from age to age? Are all the scriptures of the world trying to prepare us to comprehend how we might cooperate in fulfilling larger purposes of the universe in which we live? How does our earth fit into the universal pattern? Is the earth experiment but one of many that are being conducted in the various solar systems? Are the whirling bodies that revolve in space directed by guiding intelligence as the ancients believed? As each individual directs his life by reason, is there then a divine reason that shapes the cosmos and determines destiny? Should our own lives be dedicated to the proposition that we seek to comprehend the cosmic will and to cooperate in furthering its purposes — and is this determination the essence of all religion?

Such questions ought to be pondered. The mystery of human existence should not be brushed aside as unknowable and profitless. The eternal *why* of our scientists tells us much about how the world about us is put together, and this is good. Beyond the *how* lies the *why* — and this provides a subject for a

lifetime of meditation. To say that our knowledge is too inconclusive and fragmentary is rather irrelevant. So it has been since the beginning of time, and if we wait for absolute evidence we will pass through life in a haze of doubt. The conditions of our existence are determinative. We are born imperfect in order that we might reach out toward perfection; small, in order that we might be worthy of greatness; ignorant, in order that we might gather the fruits of knowledge. If there is one clear imperative, it is that we search unceasingly for truth, understanding, and wisdom. As a corollary, we should add that we have a mandate to apply whatever we learn, however little, as a condition for a further enlargement of understanding. Prayer can be a creative method of applying what we know for the benefit of the human race and in the furtherance of what we sense are the purposes of cosmos.

Speculating imaginatively, perhaps the entire universe is the prayer of the Creator. We, in our small way, may be responding to that greater utterance when we express ourselves through prayer.

ASSIGNMENT

1. *Optional.* Keep a record of insights that have come to you during this period.

2. *Experiment.* Try to take part in the drama of the heavens, pondering on the seasons, the waxing and waning moon, the constant North Star, the festivals linked with the heavenly ritual.

3. *Stretching the Imagination.* Imagine yourself as a miniature sun shedding light on a dark world.

4. *A Suggested Form for Prayer and Meditation* (Alter to suit your needs):

Stage 1: Alignment. I, the micrososm, seek to align myself with the macrocosm.
Stage 2: Ponder the question, How can man fulfill the evolutionary intention of the power that directs the solar system?
Stage 3: Meditation. In the center of the will of God I stand.

The Writings of
FRANCIS MERCHANT

The following volumes by Francis Merchant (1912-1981) are in the library of Fellowship in Prayer

SHARED LIGHT, *1953, Dynamic Press, Chicago, Illinois.*
WEAVINGS IN THE LIGHT, *1954, Benedict College Press, Columbia, South Carolina.*
A.E.: AN IRISH PROMETHEAN, *1954, Benedict College Press, Columbia, South Carolina.*
A POCKET FULL OF WRY, *1958, The Adams Press, Chicago, Illinois.*
THE GOLDEN HOARD, Gateways To Synthesis, *1959, Texas Southern University, Houston, Texas.*
THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY, *1960, Bruce Humphries Publishers, Boston, Massachusetts.*
INTEGRATING PSYCHOLOGY, The Art of Bridging, *1961, The Common Good Publishing Company.*
THE FACE OF LONELINESS, *1962, Sapta Sindhu Prakashan, New Delhi, India.*
SYMBOL AND FANTASY . . . Plays and Poems, *1965, College Press, Fayetteville, North Carolina.*
GREAT IMAGES, *1967, College Press, Scottsbluff, Nebraska.*
PATH OF THE FIERY RAINBOW, *1967, (no publisher given).*
THE DELIGHTFUL ART OF WRITING, *1967, College Press, Scottsbluff, Nebraska.*
A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY, *1967, College Press, Scottsbluff, Nebraska.*
BESTRIDING PEGASUS and Other Poems, *1981, Lakemont, Georgia.*
THE LIGHTED WAY / THE MESSENGER AND HIS TREASURE, *with a foreword by Gloria Merchant, 1981, Lakemont, Georgia.*
ARCANE STORIES #1, *1981, Fellowship in Prayer, Princeton, New Jersey.*
ARCANE STORIES #2, *1982, Fellowship in Prayer, Princeton, New Jersey.*
ARCANE STORIES #3, *1982, Fellowship in Prayer, Princeton, New Jersey.*
ARCANE STORIES #4 *will be published in 1983 by Fellowship in Prayer.*

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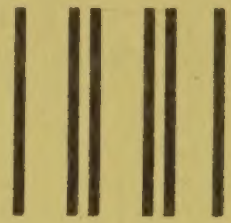

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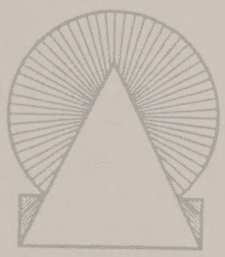

Prayer

by FRANCIS MERCHANT

Don't move my mountain, Lord,
Just give me strength to climb.
Its sides so notched and scored,
And grant me needed time.

Don't smooth my path, remove
The boulders that are there,
Just courage, Lord, to prove
I can mount the rugged stair.

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